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## Editor's Introduction: Sex and the Materiality of Adult Media

Elena Gorfinkel

It sounds like a setup, but it is adult film history: three women filmmakers meet in an adult novelty store in Coconut Grove, Florida in 1994. One is Peggy Ahwesh, the New York based avant-garde filmmaker. In works like *Martina's Playhouse* (1989), *Scary Movie* (1993) and *The Deadman* (1989), her feminist, sex-positive, Batailleian, punk-inflected cinema embraces bricolage, found footage, performance, and portraiture, often of women in states of abandon, refusal, and jouissance. With her is M.M. Serra, experimental filmmaker, curator, teacher and director of the Filmmaker's Cooperative, advocate and pedagogue on the cinematic possibilities of female sexuality. They are there to see the third: sexploitation auteur Doris Wishman, then a historical novelty for a coterie of cult video collectors. Wishman had been profiled in the RE:Search book *Incredibly Strange Films* (1986), one of the few women recognized for working in the small, largely male-helmed cottage industry of New York based sexploitation production in the 1960s.

Beginning with a copious string of nudist-camp romance films in the early 1960s, Wishman steadily continued on to making sex melodramas with the quotients of nudity that sexploitation's box-office formula required, yet infusing them with her own preoccupations and sensibilities, delighting in the promise of a unique title, premise, or gimmick. Her films often featured women trapped in scenarios of maddeningly patriarchal design, taken to dysphoric, absurdist extremes. Swirling, spiraling camerawork; a copious array of women sporting black lace undergarments; cutaways to shoes, stockings, and marginal decorative objects; and loose post-synching produced films of great dynamism and with a touch of delirium. Wishman's films were testimony to the ways women's bodies and spirits were shaped by the demands of a rigid patriarchal order, internalised as ineluctable law. Over the course of the next four decades Wishman produces thirty sex films, varying across genres from "nudies" to "roughies" to sex-horror films about the "somatic betrayal" of errant body parts (cameras implanted in breasts, transplanted penises) on to a quasi-documentary about transsexuality, *Let Me Die a Woman* (1977). By the late 1980s, Wishman had sold most of her film prints to interested collectors for fast cash, not foreseeing the interest they might have for future audiences, after struggling to finish her maudit-slasher, *A Night to Dismember* (1983-89), itself a Frankensteinian work of collaged bits and parts.<sup>3</sup> Something Weird Video, a VHS

mail-order distributor, established in 1989, had bought up many Wishman prints, and was distributing these works in the niche cult video market.

Ahwesh and Serra had learned that the filmmaker lived and worked in Miami, selling lingerie and sex toys at the Pink Pussycat Boutique. They flew down to meet her, recording an interview with her while she attended to customers at the shop, peppering her with their burning questions about her enigmatic films. Two generations of “underground” women filmmakers converge here in this moment, at this fulcrum point in Wishman’s resurrected career. Coaxed by a new and growing fanbase and greater exposure in the mid to late 1990s, Wishman tentatively reentered public life, soon becoming a truly outsize cult figure. A retrospective of four of her key films were featured at the New York Underground Film Festival in 1998, and she appeared on Late Night with Conan O’Brien. She produced her three final films in the 2000s, well in her late 80s, before her death of lymphoma in 2002 at age 90 (Wishman long lied about her age, shaving off a decade).

Ahwesh, a long-time professor at Bard College, would go on to dedicate her ground-breaking found footage film *The Color of Love* (1994), made of decaying 8mm anonymous stag film reels to Wishman, itself a reinscription of feminist genealogies across the materiality of adult cinema’s forgotten bodies. These bodies – of the stag films, of the performers, of Wishman and Ahwesh’s respective corpuses—superimpose and intertwine. They also materialise in the doubled over absence meted out by the film strip’s florid decay a testimony to the blind ravages of history, as well as to film history’s myopias about women’s films and sexual representation both.<sup>4</sup> But it is in this encounter between like-minded women across generations of filmmaking on the margins, that what might matter or be made to count as a viable film historical object and as a history of women’s film practice, is reimagined.

This recollection is occasioned by Ahwesh’s own revisit and retelling: a 2019 republication of a zine she made in 1995 in honor of Wishman’s work and in conjunction with screenings that she programmed at the Other Cinematheque.<sup>5</sup> Another set of material conditions bloom, are resurrected, in the reconstruction of the print culture that is associated with the space of the micro-cinema, in which alternative histories of film propounded by independent filmmaker’s own revised canons flourished. Ahwesh’s perspicacity about Wishman, then and now, reminds how women’s film practices are often written and re-written from the margins. While dissertations and articles have been written, *no monograph exists about the work of either Wishman or Ahwesh*. Their film

practices are no less powerful for that fact, even as the specific materiality of these two grand bricoleur's works remains derided by the classification of genre, by ideology or by canonicity, and by an association with a sex cinema that is too embodied, formless, illegible in its fleshiness and air of disrepute. A final frisson of exchange, solidarity, reverence: during the interview, Ahwesh and Serra with delightful mischief, try to buy a vibrator from Wishman, asking her if she will autograph it. Doris refuses, instead signing an embroidered, doilies stuffed heart.

\*

Beginning with this story—about a meeting that is equal parts advocacy, fandom, homage, film-historical recovery-- is a way to foreground the curious historicity and materiality of sex cinema. But there are many long-forgotten women like Wishman in this field, whose names require invoking, if only as reminder of the massive historical work yet to be done, and the untold women and queer makers and performers who filmed, produced, distributed, presented and performed in sex films. Many come to mind: in the 1960s-1980s sex film industry alone, among them we might consider the Times Square restaurateur, theatre owner and lesbian sex film producer Chelly Wilson, the distributor and producer of Audubon Films, Ava Leighton; the cinematographer, actor and sex-horror director Roberta Findlay, the feminist pioneer of porn for women, Candida Royalle, and the underrecognized director and actor, Ann Perry, first female president of the Adult Film Association of America. When expanded to consider beyond this industry towards sexually expressive independent and experimental productions the names continue to proliferate.

### *Adult Media's Materiality*

The issue's contributions bring together approaches that expand and complicate the distinctions between high and low forms, commercial porn industries and independent productions, and between queer and straight sex media, contesting the purisms of what can count as cinema, art, value by instead foregrounding the import of materiality. This issue suggests that we must contend with how sexual representations, across practices, communities, publics, and counterpublics, have always revealed adult media to be vexed sites of materiality. To say that materiality defines our understanding of cinematic sex

acts is in these senses hardly a provocative claim. But there is some force to the profuse ways that sex media is figured as material through an incontrovertible fleshiness, one that is difficult to refute or disavow. Many have aptly noted the premise of the “peter meter” utilised by the late 1960s sex weekly *Screw*, and later by *Hustler*’s capsule reviews, which measured the level of a film’s sexiness by the index of its capacity to arouse a definitionally and physiognomically male viewer. Alternately, the rhetorical valence of the definitions of *soft-core* and *hard-core*, as genre markers, discursively index the kinds of bodies--erect or flaccid, rigid or sopitive--that these films expose, anatomize, put to work and produce. Via arousal, disgust, residue, clutter, decay or absence, of bodies on screen and our own bodies, and of the technological formats and filmic objects themselves, the primacy of embodiment plays out as a constitutive factor of the adult media text, perennially tarrying with the seduction and threat of the mimetic. Cinematic sex troubles and catalyzes the use of historical methodologies and modes of interpretation. Does the text matter as much as past critics have suggested? Susanna Paasonen usefully writes in her argument for affective approaches to online porn’s materiality, that its scope ranges from

the materiality of the bodies performing in and viewing pornography; the technological objects, protocols, networks, and platforms through which porn materializes as certain kinds of objects; the materiality of perception; and the textures of pornographic images. This also means that studies of online porn cannot be confined solely to the representational...<sup>6</sup>

Indeed, recent work on adult media has moved beyond the representational, to consider censorship, format, and distribution and circulation networks.<sup>7</sup> Industrial organisations, labor infrastructures, legal conditions, exhibition histories and production cultures all make a valuable and expansive contribution to the field, securing an understanding of adult film practices at a wider range of scale. At the same time, the weight of representation – and I would suggest its dense materiality--for sex media does and must remain a central subject of analysis, especially when it remains tethered to an understanding of political and economic consideration.

Decades of feminist, queer, phenomenological and historical research into the importance of the sexualised, performing, and labouring body to cinematic history also bear out some of these trajectories of the text’s materiality: from Linda Williams’s conception of the leaky viscosity of body genres, to Laura Kipnis’s readings of the incitements of the fat body in porn; and from Thomas Waugh’s account of pre-Stonewall

illicit production and circulation of gay male erotica, to Ariane Cruz's account of practices and representations of BDSM kink and its implications for black women's non heteronormative sexualities and desires.<sup>8</sup> The gendered and sexed work that bodies do, before and behind the camera, and in the space of viewing, supports and props up the very identity of the adult text as object, as experience, as commodity.

Of course, the import of materiality for sexual media registers in multiple ways. In addition to the sensorial and concrete relation of bodies to each other in diegetic and extra diegetic terms, materiality also references the concrete, contracted or provisional conditions of labor, performance, and production in which performers work and make their livelihood. For example, Mireille Miller Young's research on black women performers and sexual subjectivity and autonomy foregrounds the racialised complexities of black women's performance and sex work; Heather Berg's research on the conditions of sex workers in the new precarious digital economy emphasise a supple engagement with twenty first century labour as a field of self-determination as well as exploitation in a contemporary climate of austerity.<sup>9</sup>

Materiality as framework also points to the conditions of media objects and texts themselves, at the level of form, format, grain. Laura U. Marks discusses how certain films that chart disappearance invite an affective mournful relation; Ahwesh's *The Color of Love* in its image decay invites such a reading. Lucas Hilderbrand treats the erotics of bootlegging and the aesthetics of excessive VHS degradation as phenomenon that reveals palimpsests of cultural memory and affective encounter with sexual media.<sup>11</sup> Attending to materiality can also highlight processes of making, use, transformation, exchange, and affective economies, including places where the reworking and recirculation of porn generates supplementary meanings, as in practices of queer collage, or in the replaying of a loved object, as in the film *KIP* by Nguyen Tan Hoang which considers an obsessive relationship to a porn star via the filmmakers own self representation in the reflection of his degraded video on screen.<sup>12</sup>

By invoking materiality in this way, and perhaps bringing the notion of "vulgar Marxism" into an entirely new terrain, this issue perversely courts and snakes together the legacies of the "old materialisms" of political economy and the feminist "new materialisms" of object-thinking (explored in FMH issue 2, edited by Caetlin Benson Allott), but redirects both towards alternate imaginings and analytics of sex acts, and their mediation.<sup>14</sup> Juan Suarez in his research on the queer underground and the ribald, deliriously licentious, scatological films of George and Mike Kuchar, provides one such

route, as he identifies a “new materialist turn” in queer media studies, citing work by Karl Schoonover, Rosalind Galt, and Lucas Hilderbrand, as it “examines the (often unspoken) material horizons that subtend sexuality and its representations- be it the ‘thingness’ of the body, particular objects and substances, or the renderings and distortions unique to various media – and that shows that the range of the sexual exceeds interiority, individuality and anthropomorphic embodiment, to affix itself to textures, surfaces and things, indeed it is in relation to this material interface that many of the political consequences of queerness arise.”<sup>15</sup> This exceeding of interiority points to a tension between queer and feminist approaches, but also perhaps to a vanquishment of that impasse, one that might project possible futures and ways of being together that don’t adhere to either the possessive or the property relation as a condition of autonomy. Parker Tyler the gay film critic, in his landmark work of proto-queer theoretical analysis of cinema, had assertively proclaimed that “in sexual matters, more than other matters, the movies becomes profound.”<sup>16</sup> It is this mattering of the sexual in the way that movies and other mobile media move us, that is as central as ever to the inquiries herein.

#### *Sex Matters, Archives, Historiographies*

Attending to the variety of sex cinemas, queer and straight, a new generation of historically-minded scholarship has emerged under the institutional rubric of adult film and media history.<sup>17</sup> Writing about what problems are posed by adult film’s contested status and artifactuality, David Church and Eric Schaefer describe how the “adult film has historically been cordoned off from the rest of popular entertainment through censorship, alternative production and distribution channels, separation in physical space, etc., resulting in challenges in its historiography that are seldom confronted in other areas of media history.”<sup>18</sup> An emphatic precarity attends any repository--digital or analog--of adult moving image media. Sexual expression across media practices has long been made on the one hand overly material, and on the other a zone for dematerialization, prone to disappearance, and suppression due to its cultural, social and political marginality, perceived as a threat to the social order, public health and “moral values.”

The texts and objects that constitute the corpus that goes under the banner of adult film and media are continually inscribed by material processes: historically marked as obscene, subject to censorship, regulation, redistricting, zoning, proscribed by formats and obsolete platforms as well as a driver of new technological modes, and prone to other forms of policing, including aesthetic coding (art or porn?). They are both incredibly

profuse, burgeoning in physical private collections, and equally in danger of disappearance without proper preservation or well-resourced archives for their devoted care.<sup>19</sup> Adult media further pose specific challenges to historians, due to the poor documentation of production and reception of adult film, and the uneven, asystematic, and often scant preservation of these films outside of the work of commercial video distributors and a rather fickle profit-driven industry. David Church and Eric Schaefer, as well as Peter Alilunas and Dan Erdman have described the stakes of preservation of adult film.<sup>20</sup>

Sex films and sex media are also themselves documents subject to decay, fragmentation, florescence, opacity. The affective archive has long been a subject of considerable examination especially in queer studies of pornography, localizing and intersecting with activist histories and identifications around the stakes of public culture after Stonewall. Hilderbrand argues that pornography was one of the key sites of shared cultural identification for gay men in a liberationist moment, constituting the public culture of gay collective life. An archive of feeling, as forwarded by Ann Cvetkovich, in her argument of the importance of trauma to the work of activism, also yokes the archive of lesbian sexuality to loss and mourning. Such accounts of affect have made their way into thinking about porn collections in terms of a retrospective and nostalgic gaze of the adult media spectator and collector.<sup>23</sup>

Feminist, queer and critical race scholarship on pornography expanded considerably in the twenty-five years between the publication of Linda Williams's field defining book *Hard Core: Power Pleasure and the Frenzy of the Visible*, in 1989, and the establishment of the journal *Porn Studies* (2014). Recent work by Mireille Miller Young, Ariane Cruz, Heather Berg, Constance Penley, and Jennifer Moorman has also moved towards infrastructural and scalar analyses of production cultures, women as performers, workers and makers as well as pleasure-seekers in the domain of adult media practices.<sup>24</sup> Without question, the adult film has been both a difficult, animating and foundational subject for feminist media studies, as articulated by Laura Helen Marks in her recent essay in this journal; indicating that "pornography is such a politically fraught topic of discussion, especially for feminists, that efforts on the part of porn scholars to provide valuable interventions in feminist media studies are often met with hostility, dismissal, or polite silence."<sup>25</sup> Even as the field has developed, embraced, and built on the work of feminist media scholars such as Williams and Penley, there is still a rather notable



disconnect between the presumption of feminist approaches to media forms and a cautious embrace of the adult media text as a viable object of analysis.

Queer and GLTBQ scholarship, perhaps one of the most bountiful sites of work on pornographies and adult media, on the other hand has approached pornographic expressivity as a site for community formation, the creation of counterpublics, a terrain of contact zones, as eloquently described by Samuel R. Delany, and as sites for the making visible and palpable the articulation of transformative desire, self-determination, sociality.<sup>26</sup> Post-third wave feminist engagements with pornography – as representation, industry, as mode of circulation, and as site of labor—has seen a dramatic expansion, but there remain ways that the questions posed by feminist scholarship and queer scholarship on adult media just as frequently diverges as it converges across fault lines of gender identification and sexuality and its expression. Furthermore, considerations of agency, power, expressivity, and labor resonate quite differently in each outpost of research.

Queer studies has multiple genealogies with complex but important relationships to feminism. In the best-known version, foundational work such as Gayle Rubin's "Thinking Sex" and Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* posed challenges to feminist political orthodoxy and essentialist identity categories, but another important intellectual history roots queer studies within women of color feminism, as articulated in Michael Hames-Garcia's "Queer Theory Revisited."<sup>27</sup> Such intersectional approaches have in fact yielded some of the most materialist historicisations of pornography – among scholars doing work on the conjunction of racialised subjectivities and sexuality. Ariane Cruz, Mireille Miller Young, Amber Musser, and Lamonda Horton Stallings, drawing on varied histories of racial subjugation, sexual demonization and anti-blackness inscribed in adult media's hierarchies of desirability, sexual scripts and each in their own way grapple with the question of the flesh as a racialised category of knowledge and object of cathexis.<sup>28</sup> But they do not foreclose on the possibilities of female, queer and nonheteronormative pleasures for black women and women of color to emerge from these interstices of performance and labor.

One of the ways editing this special issue illuminated the field to me was that it revealed that, at times, feminist and queer approaches to adult media diverge to ask fundamentally different questions reflective of different positionalities and investments. Although I feel compelled to reconcile them, perhaps it is more productive that they exist in tension, alongside each other, in dialogue. Rather than belabouring the faultlines between the gender/sexuality axis or the competing claims on power or pleasure, the

essays here seeks new ways of aligning or putting in conversation approaches across a wide array of adult material and sex media through attention to its material realities, urgencies and exigencies.

### *Guide to the Contributions*

This issue and its contributors considers how conceptions of materiality both trouble and cohere practices across that uneven archive of adult film and media. It aims to articulate the stakes of studying adult media in an intersectional conversation between feminist and queer approaches to pornography, sex films, and adjacent sexual media. The essays assembled here pursue such concerns through case studies, microhistories, archival re-orientations, and historical recoveries. The material force and contingencies of erotic performance, labor, and corporeal expressivity, as well as political economies, production histories, and archival and historiographic recoveries can be opened towards new avenues of comparative analysis. The essays here are marked by a commitment to understand the devalued forms of work and life of women and queer makers.

Taking on the challenges of format to any account of adult film, particularly the “golden age” 1970s classics of the porno chic era, Whitney Strub considers the ways the history of pornography has long been circumscribed unwittingly by the hidden practices of porn producers and distributors who transferred many 1970s 35mm “classics” onto VHS for rental and purchase in the adult video boom of the 1980s. A historiographic detective plot that scans and scours the varied formats and shifting versions of many films significant to the existing history of the period, including those by Radley Metzger and Joe Gage, Strub reveals an industry attempting to edit out more transgressive sexual acts that defy the congealing boundaries being established by the flourishing commerce for hardcore on video. Tracking the erasure of specific sexual acts and “numbers” from numerous films, such as fisting, pissing and pegging, Strub contends that these elisions complicate distinctions between gay and hetero porn that neatly bisect the output of 1970s adult film practices. In suggesting that our understanding of 1970s hard core need not have adhered to the principles of markets tidily defined by sexual orientation and films that conform to a normalising uniformity of sexual desire that cordons off queer and straight pleasures, Strub unveils the ways pornography’s materiality has long been yoked at once to a market principle that prioritized commercial viability over the preservation of

sexual expressivity, therefore silencing the history of 1970s hardcore as a far more polymorphically perverse and unfixed site of sexual exploration.

If adult media's materiality also signals an implicit precarity, one both technological and ideological, as Strub's essay attests, Darshana Sreedhar Mini's contribution explores the precarity and circulability of the definitive and emblematic soft-core porn star of Keralan cinema, Shakeela, through circuits of exchange in Malayalam cinema of the 1980s to the 2000s. Describing the emergence of soft-core as genre and mode in Keralan cinema, and its suturing to the embodied image of Shakeela, whose body many distributors thus also pirated and spliced into their own products, Mini considers the peculiarly visible and invisible status of Shakeela and her star text. Mini elaborates on how Shakeela's fulsome corporeality signified generic specificity and flouted cultural attitudes about female independence and autonomy. In thinking through the question of a star body as a site for sexually inflected labor, Mini's essay also echoes the interest of many other scholars in this volume in the interrogation of performance labor. Mini's (as well as Clarke, Powell, Ogrodnik, Embree and Icreverzi) emphasise the necessity of new approaches to histories of filmic production that do not sever the materiality of screen performance from the conditions of that performance's capture, exhibition and circulation, a polysemic terrain of shifting meanings. Mini and the other contributors answer Amy Herzog's call for methods that might linking performance and political economy, when she asks that we consider, "how historical work on labor and industry structures could be brought into dialogue with figural analyses of cinematic bodies when studying a specific media work."<sup>30</sup> Mini's analysis attests to how close analysis can advance thick description alongside a robust theoretical framework, as industrial questions of accumulation and circulation need not be opposed to concerns of form and representation.

Thinking through the implications of directing adult cinema in the Japanese context as a practice of social reproduction, Kim Icreverzi examines the work of one of the most prolific female filmmakers of the sound era, Hamano Sachi, who has made approximately three hundred pink films in a career spanning back to the late 1960s. Utilizing Hamano's autobiography as a framework to explore the material realities of female authorship within this mode of production, Icreverzi draws on the work of feminist social reproduction theory to unravel how the dynamic of visibility attached to adult film for a women director works paradoxically as a logic of invisibilization, blotting out the import and significance of her wide corpus of films, many of which remain lost.

Icreverzi recovers in Hamano's existent films a specific circumnavigation and refutation of the phallic, masculinist economies of pink cinema as genre, seeing in the director's preoccupation with female desire, social exchange, and aging sexuality a means of negotiating and reorienting the genre's male driven myopias and fetishes. Poignantly recounting Hamano's autobiographical narrative of experiencing herself and her own legacy as a site of obliteration, Icreverzi restores to the filmmaker an investment in the vitalizing capacities of cinema to make life through the sustaining processes and ineluctability of labor.

The powerful labors of performance and their import for understanding women's sexual expression interlink with histories of an emergent gay male adult sexual culture in the hardcore era in Ryan Powell's acutely materialist account of the 1970s New York based nightlife magazine *After Dark*. The magazine which flourished in the period signalled a domain of sexual performative creativity that produced alliances between straight and queer women and gay men, on the page as well as in artistic and erotic collaboration. Considering the development of a style of performative self-presentation visible in the era's print venues, and associated with the border crossing, and genre defying nature of these sites of queer print culture, Powell asserts the force of a "hard-core style" and its "seduction of boundaries." A magazine that catered to a largely gay audience but one which avoided explicit exposure or the penetrative act, *After Dark* mobilized its star powered profiles of theatrical personae, celebrities and musical performers as domain of florid yet inexplicit gay eroticism. Powell details the interrelations between 1970s queer nightlife and specific female stars that appeared in the magazine, such as dancer and nightclub performer Chita Rivera, actress and musician Dana Gillespie, & and singer and dancer Re Styles who performed with the musical group The Tubes. Powell argues that these moments of eroticized play and staged gay-straight coupling emblemized a form of "queer heteroeroticism", in which women and gay men were positioned in scenarios "that elects or sponsors opposite-sex coupling as a site for the reconfiguration of non-normative sex and gender practice." (Powell p.?) Representing a specific moment in the era of porno-chic, and capitalizing on its performative frisson, the erotic play and experimentation with an imaginary that joined the sexual expressivity of women and gay men created new configurations and possibilities of a liberatory world beyond hetero-sexist, binary and cis-gendered conceptions of gender, sexuality and social roles.

Performance and collaboration also animate the historiographic and archival intervention of Alissa Clarke's re-examination of Niki De Saint Phalle's *Daddy* (1973), made with British documentarian Peter Whitehead. Clarke revisits the Whitehead archives at DeMontfort to reconsider the largely psychoanalytic analyses that have attended De Saint Phalle's forceful filmic collaboration. Diverging from psycho-semiotic arguments, Clarke deploys a performance studies approach, deploying media historiography to think through how De Saint Phalle's film extended her creative practice from her paintings, installations and performances, as well as built on a series of collaborations not only with Whitehead but also with the other women who performed the role of Niki in the film. Clarke proposes that considering the gendered performance labour of Saint Phalle's vision and practice allows us a new way in to some of the overtrodden and fatiguing debates about the film's psycho-dramatic elements and Oedipal intonations in its staging of sexual trauma. In her richly descriptive reconstruction of forms of friendships, sexual relationships, artistic training, and aesthetic genealogies, Clarke allows us to revisit *Daddy* with new eyes and with a refreshed understanding of the complexity of the shared and erotic endeavours and collective labours that were involved in the making of the film. Asserting the potency of Saint Phalle's performative and collaborative gestures, as well as the skill and training of its female performers, Clarke puts *Daddy*'s indulgence in psycho-sexual play and iterative catharsis of trauma into conversation with the artist's broader aesthetic preoccupations. In this her materialist preoccupation with specific ways of working, crafting sculptural objects and treating sculptural materials, among them bodies and camera, yield an original and necessary methodological riposte to considering representation in a vacuum outside women's performance labour and the complexity of women's self-representation and their sexual expressivity.

A similar impetus drives the investigation of Ben Ogrodnik's microhistory of Sharon Green's single film work and nude self-portrait during her time studying amidst the Pittsburgh avant-garde scene in the late 1960s. Green, who only made this single work, left film to become a psychoanalyst. A poignant account of the ways that women's roles in underground scenes were often narrated through their access to and conditionality to male filmmakers in these worlds, Green's story of developing aesthetic interest in film is set against her working as a figure models for filmmakers Robert Haller and Stan Brakhage. Enlivened by the work she was seeing, while also circumspect about her position within the work of Haller, Green took the contact sheets she was given by Haller

of her own modelling and made her own film, a riposte and retort to her framing by Haller's view. Her own work, both self-portrait and remediation, offers ways of apprising herself as both subject and object of a gaze by others and herself. Ogrodnik places Green's film in the richly textured context of the Pittsburgh experimental film network of the late 1960s and early 1970s, and in relation to proximate women artists who experimented with filming their own bodies and performative embodiments. His account of Green's single film contends with what it might mean to tarry with the fragments of a women's film history, one that could have been otherwise. Employing microhistory to recover and reposition women's roles and difficult positioning as erotically charged objects in the avant-garde context, Ogrodnik foregrounds, through careful historical detail and interviews with the filmmaker, Green's own voice and the materiality of her confrontation with the horizon of what was in that moment possible for her creatively, and what was foreclosed.

As Ogrodnik's narrative of this single work attests, materiality also inscribes absence, that which cannot be registered in visual field and that around which only fragments, traces and counterfactuals remain. Such contingencies and realities of absence also orient John Stadler's approach to the material histories and creative imaginaries channelled by the practice of phone sex in the era of AIDS. Stadler's essay examines Robert Chesley's 1985 play *Jerker, Or the Helping Hand*, through a media archeological lens, thinking through how the performance and audio reproduction and circulation of the play on radio archived and traced anxieties and possibilities resonant in phone sex's ascendance as a form of intimacy through distance. Phone sex, Stadler argues, became a sex act suitable to the difficulties of erotic contact posed by the AIDS crisis, as well as activist's initiatives towards safe sex. Chesley's *Jerker* dramatizes a relationship between two men that occurs across the divide of this communication technology so redolent with the loquacity and creative production of queer life worlds, but also a manifestation of erotic possibility through narrativity. Exploring the differing versions of the play across theatrical and radio stints, and its subsequent censorship and suppression in the latter transfer to broadcast media, Stadler reveals the knotty and fascinating histories that rest in sexual mediation by the telephone in an era that saw an incredible loss of gay lives. The affective pull and erotic charge of phone sex as mode of contact relies on a specific historicity and materiality, and Stadler suggests that Chesley's work ultimately reveals the modes' capacity for the making of collective dreams and fantasies.

Desirae Embree's archival reflection closes the issue with a moving call to consider the fate of sex media and adult films in archives through yet another site of absence and inaccessibility, that of the remains and traces of lesbian porn. Embree discusses her difficulties tracking and accessing lesbian porn and sexual, and the problems of lesbian porn's invisibility in the sexuality archive. She considers the materiality of archives as site, centralising the very political matter of the objects that they contain. Describing her process attempting to watch rare VHS copies of lesbian porn at archives which have not been able to digitize the work she has inquired to see, the question of economic and ideological precarity, technological formats and social legibility posed by Mini and Strub return to the fore with a different set of implications. How can these works be cared for while also be viewed and accessed? No doubt a familiar paradox for any archivally engaged scholar, such tensions between privacy and publicity, and between marginality and legibility play out in specific ways in the case of lesbian adult media – as it is frequently lowest on the radar for preservation, as well as for an acknowledgment of its sheer *existence* at all. To recover the works of queer women's sexual expression requires a set of protocols to negotiate our blind spots and myopias about lesbian porn as porn, as culturally significant and as erotically charged, without compromise.

Notes:

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<sup>3</sup> For key work on Wishman, see Michael J. Bowen. "Embodiment and Realization: The Many Film-Bodies of Doris Wishman." *Wide Angle* 19, no. 3 (1997): 64-90.; Moya Luckett, "Sexploitation as Feminine Territory: The Films of Doris Wishman." in Antonio Reboll et al eds. *Defining Cult Movies: The Cultural Politics of Oppositional Taste* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003): 142-156; Tania Modleski, "Women's Cinema as Counterphobic Cinema: Doris Wishman as the Last Auteur," in Jeffrey Sconce, ed. *Sleaze Artists: Cinema at the Margins of Taste, Style, Politics*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007 ; Elena Gorfinkel, "The Body as Apparatus: Chesty Morgan Takes on the Academy," *Unruly Pleasures: The Cult Film and its Critics* . London: FAB Press, 2000 ; Gorfinkel, *Lewd Looks:*

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American Sexploitation Cinema in the 1960s , Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017.

<sup>4</sup> For more on this film see, Elena Gorfinkel, "Arousal in Ruins: Peggy Ahwesh's *The Color of Love* and the Haptic Object of Film History," *World Picture* (2010). 1-19

<sup>5</sup> Peggy Ahwesh, ed. *The Films of Doris Wishman* . New York: Light Industry & Inpatient Press, 2019.

<sup>6</sup> Paasonen, Susanna. *Carnal Resonance: Affect and Online Pornography*. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2011 . )8.

<sup>7</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand, "Historical Fantasies: 1970s Gay Male Pornography in the Archives ." *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars* ( 2016): 335 . Peter Alilunas, *Smutty Little Movies: The Birth and Regulation of Adult Video* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016); Church, Marks.

<sup>8</sup> Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess." *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991): 2-13; Laura Kipnis, *Bound and Gagged: Pornography and the Politics of Fantasy in America* . Durham : Duke University Press, 1996; Lotte Hoek. *Cut-pieces: Celluloid Obscenity and Popular Cinema in Bangladesh*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013; Thomas Waugh, *Hard to Imagine: Gay Male Eroticism in Photography and Film from Their Beginnings to Stonewall* . New York Columbia University Press, 1996; Ariane Cruz, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM and Pornography* . New York: New York University Press, 2016 ;

<sup>9</sup> See Miller-Young, Mireille. *A Taste for Brown Sugar: Black Women in Pornography* . Duke University Press, 2014; Miller-Young, Mireille . "Putting Hypersexuality To Work: Black Women And Illicit Eroticism In Pornography." *Sexualities* 13, no. 2 (2010): 219-235 . Heather Berg; "Porn Work, Feminist Critique, and the Market for Authenticity." *Signs*. 42, no. 3 (2017), 669-692; Berg, "A Scene is Just a Marketing Tool: Alternative Income Streams in Porn's Gig Economy." *Porn Studies* [Porn and Labour, special issue]. 3, no. 2 (2016), 160-174.

<sup>11</sup> Marks, Laura. "Loving a disappearing image." *Cinemas: revue d'études cinématographiques/Cinemas: Journal of Film Studies* 8, no. 1-2 (1997): 93-111;; Lucas Hilderbrand. *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright*. Duke University Press, 2009.



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<sup>12</sup> David Evans Frantz, Lucas Hilderbrand, Kayleigh Percov, eds. *Cock Paper Scissors* (New York & L A: Leslie Lohman Museum, One National Gay and Lesbian Archives of Los Angeles at USC.) 2016.

<sup>14</sup> This witticism is entirely owed to the urging of Lucas Hilderbrand.

<sup>15</sup> Juan A. Suarez, "The Kuchars, the 1960s, and Queer Materiality," *Screen* 56 .1 (Spring 2015): 27; see also Juan A. Suárez . "Warhol's 1960s' Films, Amphetamine, and Queer Materiality." *Criticism* 56, no. 3 (2014): 623-652. For another approach to the embodied components of avant-garde film , see See also Osterweil, Ara. *Flesh cinema: The Corporeal Turn in American Avant-Garde Film* . Manchester University Press, 2014.

<sup>16</sup> Parker Tyler, *Screening the Sexes: Homosexuality in the Movies*. (N Y: Da Capo, 1972.) xxiv.

<sup>17</sup> A scholarly interest group focused on adult film history was founded in 2014 within the Society for Cinema and Media Studies. Group founder Eric Schaefer and member David Church elaborate on the work of this research area and the usage of adult media as frame contra porn:" 'Adult film' can encompass any moving-image medium and any sexual orientations and acts. "Adult film" incorporates not only material designed strictly as entertainment or for sexual stimulation but also films that are educational, experimental, or for other purposes. Finally, "adult" is the term used by the industry itself since the 1960s—from the trade group Adult Film Association of America to the industry publication Adult Video News. Although "pornography" continues to be an easy appellation, a shift to "adult film" could effectuate the integration of such material into the larger continuum of media history." David Church and Eric Schaefer, "Why Adult Film History Matters," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 58 . 1 (2018): 142.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. ,

<sup>19</sup> On the nature of porn archives, material histories, and affectivity, see Whitney Strub, "Indexing Desire: the Gay Male Pornographic Video Collection as Affective Archive.," in Amy Stone and Jaime Cantrell, eds. *Out of the Closet and Into the Archives*, Albany : SUNY Press, 2015. 125-147; Lucas Hilderbrand, "Historical Fantasies: 1970s Gay Male Pornography in the Archives ." *Porno Chic and the Sex Wars* (2016): 335.

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<sup>20</sup> Church and Schaefer, "Why Adult Film History Matters," 142; Peter Alilunas and Dan Erdman, "The Adult Film History Project," *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies* , 58 . 1 (2018) 152-157.

<sup>23</sup> David Church. *Disposable Passions: Vintage Pornography and the Material Legacies of Adult Cinema* . New York & London: Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Linda Williams. *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible"*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989,1999; Williams, Linda . "Porn studies: Proliferating pornographies on/scene: An introduction ." *Porn studies*, ed Williams , Duke University Press, 2004 . 1-23.

<sup>25</sup> Laura Helen Marks, "Feminist Porn Studies," *Feminist Media Histories* , Vol. 4 No. 2 (Spring 2018) 141-146 .

<sup>26</sup> Samuel Delany, *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue* , New York: New York University Press, 1999.

<sup>27</sup> ■ ■ ■ Thanks to Lucas Hilderbrand for clarifying this point and suggesting the work of Hames-Garcia.

<sup>28</sup> ■ Horton-Stallings, LaMonda. *Funk the Erotic: Transaesthetics and Black Sexual Cultures* . Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

<sup>30</sup> Amy Herzog, "Assemblage, Constellation, Image: Reading Filmic Matter." *Discourse* 38, no. 2 (2016): 219.